

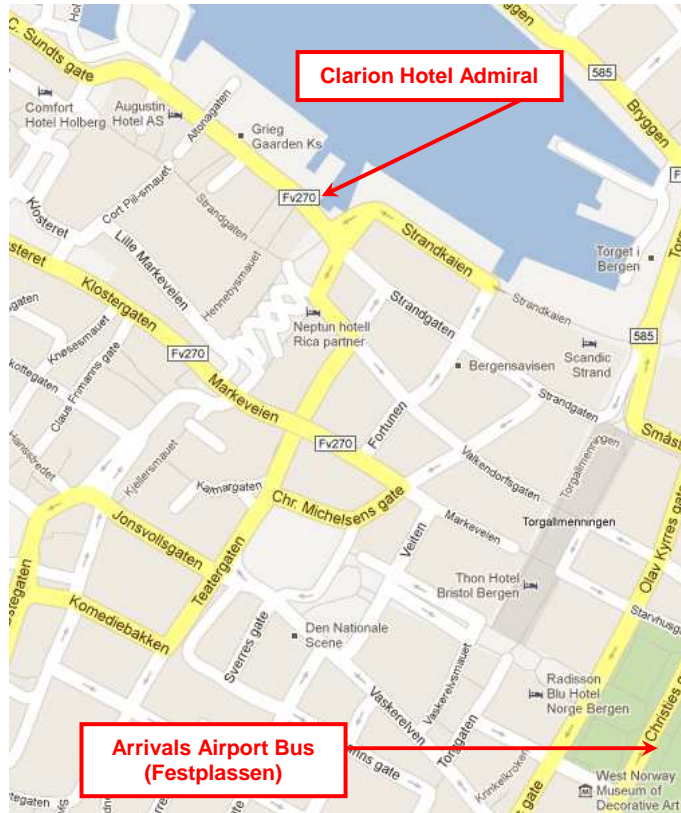
FURTHER INFORMATION

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GODFREY OF VITERBO AND HIS READERS

International Symposium
Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Bergen

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Godfrey of Viterbo, chronicler and imperial notary in the late twelfth century, was certainly one of the most daring historiographers of his time. In his works, the lineage of the Hohenstaufen emperors Frederick Barbarossa and Henry VI is traced directly to Charlemagne and Augustus, to the kings of Troy and of the Old Testament, and to Jupiter and everyone who wielded imperial power in the past. He structured universal history genealogically under the term *imperialis prosapia*. Such a *prosapia* could be free from any princely or papal influence — a concept that must have sounded very appealing to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, particularly after his defeat in the Treaty of Venice in 1177. However, these works were not only important at the time of writing — Godfrey's historiographical construction appeared to strike the right note long after the twelfth century, with more than fifty manuscripts of his works produced across Europe during the late Middle Ages.

Modern scholarship, in contrast, has not shown particular interest in this writer. Compared to chroniclers like Otto of Freising or universalists like Vincent of Beauvais, Godfrey has been downright neglected. His books have been criticized both for a lack of structure and for bad style; and to this day, there is no modern critical edition of his works. The little attention he has received came mainly from German scholars in the 1970s and '80s who identified him with one of the known scribes in the imperial chancery and who studied his political ideas as those of the Hohenstaufen court. However, since the 1990s scholarly interest in his works has, with a few significant exceptions, abated.

This modern reading of Godfrey does not do him justice, as his works were widely read and copied in large areas of late medieval Europe. Obviously, most of the manuscripts are of German provenance. The continuing popularity of the Hohenstaufen as historical models in

late medieval Germany also ensured that a strong German interest in Godfrey was maintained, universal though his works were. Nevertheless, other manuscripts exist from Northern Italy, as well as from England, Poland, Spain and Bohemia. Interestingly, those manuscripts from Aragon and Catalonia were produced from the late 13th century onwards, at precisely the time when Alfonso X of Castile was elected King of the Romans (in 1257). Similarly, it is possible to see a connection between the English manuscripts and Richard of Cornwall (who in the same year was also crowned King of the Romans). Those from Bohemia were produced from the 14th century onwards, when the Luxemburg dynasty wore the crown of the Holy Roman Empire. In Charles IV's representative castle of Karlštejn outside Prague, one even finds a cycle of images that clearly depict the *imperialis prosapia* as described by Godfrey of Viterbo.

19th-century scholars suggested that Godfrey's history enjoyed 'an unmerited fame' during the late Middle Ages. Nevertheless, whenever anyone sought imperial legitimacy or some kind of ideological connection to the Hohenstaufen in late medieval Europe, copies of Godfrey's *Pantheon* were produced — with far greater frequency than of Otto of Freising's chronicle. Indeed, one could say that Godfrey's work became the quintessential imperial history in the late Middle Ages. It was brought from south to north, from west to east, from center to periphery; and alongside his texts moved the ideas that he expressed. The reception of these ideas provided legitimacy, while their re-invention created new political concepts. Nonetheless, this fame — merited or not — has never been studied thoroughly in modern scholarship. For this reason, the distribution of Godfrey's works will be studied systematically during this conference — as well as their manuscripts and their influence on historiography and political thought. The political situation in which the histories, mostly the *Pantheon*, were read and copied is of particular importance in this framework. In bringing together scholars from Britain, Norway, Germany, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic this conference will explore Godfrey's immense popularity in the Middle Ages.